

"VINDEX" AGAIN.

"VINDEX" is out with another pamphlet—if a man can be said to be "out" who writes under cover of an assumed name. He does not like my brief answer to his last. He says—or rather he quotes another anonymous person who says—that it was "provoking," but no answer at all. He accuses me of dreadful things—evasions and perversions of his meaning. He is charitable enough not to slaughter my moral character on the spot, as he could so easily do; he leaves a small loop-hole of escape for my personal integrity; but he utters the severe verdict that it was most discreditable to me that, under any circumstances, I should have done the things he describes.

And I survive? Well, yes. Taking one consideration with another I am not much moved by all this anonymous wrath. There is first what seems to me the weighty consideration that, where evasion is charged, there was nothing to evade; and, where perversion, that there was nothing worth perverting, had I been ten times the perverter I am so well known to be. There is also ground to conjecture that the shrill notes which "Vindex" utters from behind his wall, are not unconnected with the somewhat excessive efforts he was making to patch up his own case. Perhaps I can make these points clear even to the friends of that gentleman. I shall try. Let us glance at those

EVASIONS.

Please to remember, kind reader, what the position of affairs was when I came to consider what it was best to do with the pamphlet of "Vindex"—the first one, I mean. I had just concluded my own second pamphlet in reply to the Bishop of Ontario. Those who did me the honor to read what I wrote in reply to His Lordship are aware that I entered into the questions at issue at some length, and explained my own views pretty fully. So far as either the ethics or the courtesies of controversy were concerned there was no obligation resting on me to notice the pamphlet of "Vindex," who had come masked into a discussion in which

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people were using their real names. In any case, no one could reasonably expect that, if I noticed it at all, I should do more than make a brief remark or two supplementary to what was contained in my two pamphlets—which is just what I did.

Now let us see what the crushing arguments were that I evaded. In the conclusion of my first pamphlet I had said that the priesthoods of the world—I spoke generally, and had in view, as any one might see, their collective work—were engaged in “putting back men’s thoughts,” so that all that was credible to our forefathers might remain credible to us. How did “Vindex” meet this statement? Strictly speaking he did not meet it at all; and had I chosen to charge him with evasion at this point, I should have had good reason for doing so. He abstained from any expression of opinion as to what the “priesthoods” were doing, but told us what “the mass of intelligent, thoughtful, reading Christians” were doing—a thing that was no way in question. I had confined my remark to “priesthoods” purposely; because I wished to signify a class of men who are bound by creeds, and whose special business it is to see that the beliefs of the past do not lose their hold on the men of the present. There was nothing in my original statement about priesthoods on the one hand, and the representatives of “modern thought” on the other, which excluded the existence of a middle class. On the contrary, the very conditions of the case manifestly required that there should be such a class, for it would be nothing short of a miracle—and I don’t believe much in miracles—to find the world divided between extreme conservatism and the most advanced liberalism.

What I had to deal with, therefore, was in reality “Vindex’s” evasion of my statement that—to put it briefly—the priesthoods were reactionary. He apparently claimed a progressive character for himself, and I therefore observed that, if it was distinctly understood that any progress which he hoped to achieve was “within the limits of the Westminster Confession, the force of my (original) remark would not be much impaired.” And so I say now; and I say further, that when an honest man *means* progress within

the limits of a fixed and antiquated creed, he should distinctly say so, and not leave others to find out what he means by finding out what he is. So much for evasion No 1. Where does it lie? With the man on the street? or with the man behind the wall?

Vindex quotes from his first pamphlet the following sentence to indicate the point at which my second lapse occurred :

"It is well to have it clearly understood (1) that Evolution, as limited by known facts, does not deprive us of a single argument for the existence of God, and (2) that the question of the supernaturalness of the Christian religion is not to be settled by a few well-worn, oft-repeated and unworthy sneerings at the miracles of the Old Testament."

At the risk of being indicted for "preversion," I have ventured for convenience' sake to number the two propositions which this sentence embraces. In regard to the first, I might have said that, while I had no desire that the doctrine of Evolution should weaken the belief in God in any human heart, there was no doubt that it had done much to impair the "argument from design," which has heretofore been regarded as a main support of theistic belief. Why did I not make this remark then, seeing that it would have been pertinent? Simply because it had been made and developed at considerable length in both my pamphlets. "Vindex" was bringing forward no new arguments, nor any arguments at all; he was simply contenting himself with one of those calm affirmations, which people indulge in who think they have only to speak and it will stand fast.

The second proposition is a mere insipid truism, which no man on the safe side of delirium tremens could possibly convert into an object of dread, a thing to be evaded. Most certainly the supernatural claims of the Christian religion are *not* to be settled by any amount of sneering, well-worn or brand-new, worthy or unworthy, at the miracles of the Old Testament, or at any other miracles. A thousand times "Yes!" to that proposition. It may not be a very precious truth, but it is a truth beyond all question. And to think that I should be charged with running away from it! Really it is too bad; if I had only thought for a moment that

"Vindex" wanted my express assent to his harmless dictum he should have had it and welcome. I like something safe and non-committal, when I can get it, as well as any other man; and that is just what this proposition is. Why, a clergyman who hardly believed in the Old Testament miracles a bit, and not much more in those of the New, might come out with this in the pulpit, with perfect ease of conscience, and, as regards the bulk of his hearers, with edifying effect. It is very true, and it means nothing.

What really troubled "Vindex" at this point was, not that I had run away from his deadly guns, which he would have been only too glad to see me doing, but that I made a little remark about the phrase "well-worn sneers," and said that it reminded me, I scarcely knew how, of something the Rev. Phillips Brooks had said about clergymen whose words grew doughty just as their minds grew doubtful. Thereupon "Vindex" indulges in an elegant speculation as to how "our friend Mr. LeSueur"—the title flatters me of course—had managed to have the quotation from Mr. Brooks so handy. No doubt it was "nicely written out in his notebook." Well, this matter of quotations I shall try and manage for myself, without any help from "Vindex." What I wish to say now is, that I hardly did justice to myself in saying that "I scarcely knew how" the phrase "well-worn sneers" reminded me of Mr. Brooks's observation. A little reflection would have made the connection clear. The phrase has now a thoroughly conventional ring; and I have myself heard it, or seen it, used so often in what has impressed me as a merely evasive way, that it naturally enough recalls the Boston clergyman's statement (made in the Princeton Review for March, 1879) as to the condition of mind of certain of the clergy. "Vindex," who speculates so acutely about notebooks, might almost have discovered the *nexus* if he had tried very hard.

Let us pass now to the

PERVERSIONS

and see what entertainment awaits us there. Unfortunately

the first thing we stumble on, when we come to these "sins of a deeper dye" is a rather dishonest artifice on the part of "Vindex" himself, where he quotes me as attributing to him language which I did not attribute to him at all, but in which I simply sought to express the construction which I thought might logically be placed on one of his positions. It was for "Vindex" to accept that construction or not, as he pleased: it was *not* for him to turn round and say that I had in terms, attributed that construction of his position *to him*. Anybody with a spark of intelligence in such matters can see the point.

But was my construction of his position really a fair one and logically sound? I think it was. "Vindex" says, on the other hand, that what he really stated was "the very reverse" of my interpretation of it. Let us examine the point. Here are my words:

"As a preliminary to discussing the sudden collapse of the walls of Jericho, and other incidents of a like nature, my critic would wish to go into the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus, holding, apparently, that the former fact would become more probable, if the latter could be proved. It is doubtful how far this is wise policy. To tell people beforehand that, if they once admit the Resurrection, they will be forever estopped from questioning any marvel, however grotesque, that may be asserted to stand in any kind of relation to it, is perhaps not the best way to secure a perfectly unprejudiced consideration of such evidence as may be adducible for the central miracle."

Now "Vindex" does not in the least deny having put forward the miracle of the Resurrection as something which ought to be discussed, or enquired into, as a preliminary to examining the evidence for such narratives as that of the fall of Jericho. I ask, therefore, any man of common sense and common honesty, what this could possibly be supposed to mean, except that, if the miracle of the resurrection were once proved, he would proceed to show such an organic connection between that miracle and those of the Old Testament generally, that the latter would have to be believed on the authority, and for the sake of the former. The acceptance, therefore, of the central miracle would, *when its*

consequences were developed, estop any questioning of those dependent or connected miracles which Christ, whose supernatural character the resurrection would have proved, might be considered to have borne testimony to, by recognizing the authority of the writings in which they were recorded. "Vindex" is simple enough to think that the force of this reasoning can be nullified by calling attention to the fact that he had professed himself prepared, after getting an admission of the Resurrection, "to review the whole course of Bible history." No doubt he was; but who ever said he wasn't? We all like to review questions, when we have once got an admission which we think will block all objections to what we want to prove. Instead, therefore, of attributing to "Vindex" "the very reverse" of what he had said, I simply put a quite natural construction on what he had said; and no one knows this better than "Vindex" himself.

There is a distinct attempt at evasion in the very next paragraph we come to in the pamphlet before us. I had said: "There are those who believe the miracle of the resurrection, who do not believe that of Jericho. There are clergymen who hold that there are miracles, and miracles even in the Bible." Upon this "Vindex" exclaims: "What Christian, not to say clergymen, ever told Mr. LeSueur that the taking of Jericho and the resurrection of Christ were of equal importance?" But, my dear sir, no one was talking of the relative importance of the two things, as you know quite well; but of one being believed as true, and the other not being believed as true. Why will you place things on a false ground?

We are arrived now at perversion No. 2. It is a great and good one. When I consider it in all its length, and breadth, and height, when I stand a little way off and study the vast curves of its circumference, and faintly guess at the almost incalculable volume of its cubical contents; then when I think that, Coriolanus-like, I did it all by myself, I begin to feel as if I might claim the belt as the champion perverter of Canada at least, with good hopes of some day being champion of the world. What did I do then? Oh, something terrible; I read the word "naturalism," in the

pamphlet of this admirable writer, "materialism," and quoted it so. It is perfectly true, of course, that "naturalism," when opposed to supernaturalism, as it was in this case, has exactly the same significance as "materialism" to ninety-nine persons out of a hundred; it is perfectly true, also, that I gained nothing by the substitution, but simply put myself to the trouble of an unnecessary disclaimer; it is further true that the substitution did not in the least affect my own understanding of the meaning of the passage, or cause me to answer it otherwise than I would have done had the mistake not occurred: all this is true, and yet, this little slip of the eye is quoted by the magnanimous pamphleteer as a "perversion of his meaning,"—which he knows it was not,—and is given a place among my "sins of deeper dye." What a Rhadamanthus has here come to judgment!

Note the arts employed to make this very minute matter look important. "He (that is, I) changes an important word, and then resents the use of the word he has chosen to introduce." The question is not whether the *word* was an important one, but whether the *change* was of any importance; and "Vindex" knows it was not. As to my "resentment," whatever there was of it is to be found in the quiet remark: "I never professed a creed of materialism." Then it is asserted that I chose to introduce the wrong word. What rubbish!

However, all is well that ends well, and there is no doubt that "Vindex's" pamphlet ends well. After all this manœuvring, and setting of sails to catch a puff from any quarter, he is able to say: "We live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved us and gave Himself for us." "We believe in a risen Lord, 'whom, having not seen, we love, in whom, though now we see Him not, yet believing, we rejoice.'" This of course is conclusive proof of the excellent spiritual condition of the writer, and will doubtless make amends with some for any lack he may display of so common-place a virtue as straight-forwardness in argument. Secure now in his citadel of religious sentiment, "Vindex" calls out to ask what agreement I have with him here. Let me answer. As regards my ability to use the phrases which

"Vindex" so opportunely employs—not much. I place my own high and reverent estimate upon the moral impulse imparted to the world by the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth ; but as a watchword for to-day I should choose, in preference to the texts quoted, some formula which indicated and enforced some useful line of conduct, or which expressed some great thought on which mind and heart alike could feed. The times call loudly for such watchwords. Religion is now subsisting almost wholly upon emotion ; thought is everywhere a disturbing influence, not a strengthening element. Hence we find that the efforts made to keep up the interest in religion become, if we look in one quarter, more and more extravagant and spasmodic ; and, if we look in another, more and more vitiated by worldly calculations. We have on one side, our stately modern churches with their elaborate system of finance ; we have on the other, for those whom the churches do not reach, or else leave unmoved, Moody and Sankey, and the Salvation Army. Trying to do without thought or, with the minimum of thought, religion has to seek the alliance of worldly wealth at one end of the scale, and of ignorant fanaticism at the other. Meanwhile thought stands at the door and knocks, offering, if any man will open to her, to come in and sup with him in all the confidence of friendship. The "resurrection" that modern philosophy believes in is the perpetual resurrection of all the good that has ever existed in the world. When this great truth has found its proper embodiment in language, and its proper clothing of association, it will, I firmly believe, form the basis of a religion that will meet all the needs of humanity, and which the progress of thought will only strengthen from age to age.

W. D. LES.

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